

### **What is MRSA?**

*Staphylococcus aureus* (“staph”) is a common type of bacterium (germ) that is often found on the skin and in the nose of healthy people. It can also grow in wounds or other sites in the body, sometimes causing an infection.

Antibiotics are drugs used to treat infections caused by germs. Sometimes germs can change so that particular drugs will no longer kill the germs - these germs are called antibiotic resistant. Over time staph bacteria have become difficult to treat with antibiotics related to penicillin (e.g., methicillin, amoxicillin). These resistant forms of staph are called methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA. But the illnesses that MRSA causes are similar to those caused by other staph.

### **Who is at risk for getting these organisms?**

Just like normal staph bacteria, MRSA normally does not cause disease unless it enters an opening in the skin. However, some people are at higher risk for carrying MRSA or becoming infected with this type of staph. MRSA more often occurs in people in hospitals and healthcare facilities. It can also occur outside the hospital in people who receive multiple antibiotics, as well as in people who have close contact with a person carrying the germ or by touching objects contaminated with MRSA (e.g., towels, athletic equipment, sauna benches, bandages, etc.).

### **How are MRSA and other staph spread?**

Staph bacteria (including MRSA) are most often spread by direct person-to-person contact, usually on hands. Staph can survive in the environment for long periods of time, but environmental surfaces probably do not have a major role in transmission. Staph very rarely spreads through the air.

### **What are the symptoms of infection?**

Many people carry staph bacteria on their skin without any symptoms. Symptoms of a MRSA or other staph infection depend on where the infection is located. Infections of the skin are the most common, and can cause redness, warmth, pus, and a wound that does not heal. Your doctor may refer to these infections as cellulitis, boils, furuncles, pustules, folliculitis, impetigo, or abscesses. Infections can also develop in the blood, bone, bladder, lungs, and other sites. Symptoms there will depend on the site of infection, but include fever and pain at the site of infection.

### **What should I do if I think I have a MRSA or other staph infection?**

See your healthcare provider.

### **Are MRSA and other staph infections treatable?**

Yes. Many staph skin infections can be treated simply by draining the sore and keeping the wound clean. For more serious infections, antibiotics (that are not related to penicillin) can be used. If antibiotics are prescribed by your healthcare provider, it is very important to finish taking all the pills and to call your doctor if the infection does not get better.

### **What can I do to prevent MRSA and other staph infections?**

- Regularly wash hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (if hands are not visibly soiled) to keep them clean.
- Keep cuts/wounds clean and covered; watch for signs of infection, such as redness, warmth, and swelling.
- Clean your hands thoroughly after changing bandages. Put used bandages in the trash.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, sports equipment, razors, etc.
- If a sore or cut becomes red, oozes, causes pain, or isn't healing, see a doctor.
- If prescribed antibiotics, take all the pills, even if you feel better before they are all gone.
- Don't insist on antibiotics for treating colds or other virus infections.